Tiwa : An endangered language of Assam

(A Study with special reference to the prevailing situation in Nagaon and Morigaon districts)

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1. Introduction: This paper is on the Tiwa language, an endangered language spoken by the Tiwa community of Tibeto-Burman group found primarily in Marigaon, Nagaon, Karbi-Anglong and Kamrup district of Assam. Tiwa is spoken primarily in the district of Marigaon and in some parts of the adjoining areas of Nagaon district.

______There are two types of speech varieties of Tiwa known as *Hajowali* and *Datiyali*. The inhabitants of the hills are known as *Hajowali* and those of the plains are known as *Datiyali*. The Tiwa language is still spoken on the foothills and in some rare villages of the plains. Most of the plains people of the community have gradually shifted to *Asamiya*. But the hills people of the community have been able to retain their own language and speak *Asamiya* with competence.

The people of Tiwa are also known as Lalung. The inhabitants of the plains of the Tiwa community are Hindus, but the inhabitants of the hills are mostly Christian.

The following are the main factors to assess the state of endangerment of a language. The factors are mainly:

F1: Intergenerational language transmission
F2: Absolute number of speakers
F3: Proportion of speakers within the total population
F4: Trends in existing language domains (deals with who speaks the language, when, with whom, and on what topic)
F5: Response to new domains and media (mainly concerned with the extent to which the language copes with modernity)
F6: Materials for language education and literacy
F7: Governmental language policies
F8: Community members' attitudes towards their own language
F9: Amount and quality of documentation

Except for F2, all factors are assessed on a scale from 0 to 5, where 5 indicates that the language is safe, used on a regular basis, supported by language policies, etc. F4 deals with those who speak the language, when, with whom, and about

what topics. F5 concerns the extent to which the language copes with modernity. Other factors are self-explanatory.

2.1. Intergenerational language transmission (F1):

The most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next. In case of the Tiwa community, most of the plains Tiwa speak *Asamiya* in their regular conversations. They do not know the Tiwa language. A very small section of the Tiwa not only speaks the Tiwa language and it is but also speaks *Asamiya* with competence. Among the speakers of the Tiwa language, there is some inter-generational use of the language. it has been seen that in some villages the younger generations are non-fluent in speech but passive under standers of the language.

2.2. Absolute number of speakers and Proportion of speakers within the total population:

According to the 2001 Census reports, the total number of the plains Tiwa are 171000. But the number of the Tiwa speakers amounts only to 26481. According to the 1991 census the number of speakers was 32633(both hills and plains).

The speaker of the Tiwa language (plains) are mainly distributed in the following villages-

Nambar Gaon
Upar Bar Gaon
Pachim Nambar Gaon
Dakshin Gamari Aati
Habi Gaon
Hayang Thal
Manjoy Gaon
Bamuni Bar Lalung Gaon
Amsai Tangia Gaon
Marjung Gaon
Khoapara Bangaon
Jugdal(Sona pur)
Makaria
Dahali
Darapani
Bengnabari
Silsang (Upar Gaon & Guri Gaon)
Kronkuchi
Dabarghat
Sindisar

DeoSal

Sonaikuchi
Gobha
Gaolia
Kalbari
Pumakuchi
Gegera
Balikuchi or Balikungi (Grandparent age)
Burha Raja Gaon (Grandparent age)

2.3 Trends in existing language domains(deals with who speaks the language, when, with whom, and on what topic) **:**

The domains of the use of Tiwa are "dwindling". For example, communication in the Tiwa language takes place only among such members as know the language. It occurs mainly at home between husband and wife, parents and children and during conversations outside the home area (among the community members).

2.4 Response to new domains and media : New areas for language use may emerge as community living conditions change. While some language communities do succeeded in expanding their own language into the new domain, most do not. If the communities do not meet the challenges of modernity with their language, it becomes increasingly irrelevant and stigmatized.

The Tiwa language is restricted to a single domain (private and social conversation within the community members); it is not used in new domains. *Asamiya* and English are used in new domains.

2.5 Community members' attitudes towards their own language (F8). The maintenance, promotion, or abandonment of non-dominant languages may be dictated by the dominant linguistic culture, be it regional or national. The linguistic ideology of a state may inspire linguistic minorities to mobilize their populations towards the maintenance of their language, or may force them to abandon them. These linguistic attitudes can be a powerful force both for promotion and loss of their languages.

Brenzinger notes that if "communities do not meet the challenges of modernity with their language, it becomes increasingly irrelevant and stigmatized." This hypothesis holds true for Tiwa language. The Tiwa people are scattered in different areas of Assam. *Asamiya* is used by all as a common lingua franca for intra-group communications. In this context it

is worthwhile to mention that *Moran*, has now become extinct as all the speakers of the Moran community have adopted *Asamiya* as their first language, making a case of total language shift. In the context of Tiwa, it has been already in the process of a language shift. *Asamiya* is now often and only language spoken on a regular basis at home for most of the Tiwa communities. Economic trends have also accelerated the decline of Tiwa language. *Asamiya* is needed in all business transactions; it has become associated with upward social mobility, leaving Tiwa language as the language of a stigmatized traditional past. These socio-economic factors affect the speakers' attitudes towards their language, a crucial factor for its survival .

But the fact is that, A very small section of the Tiwa community is concerned about their language.

2.6 Governmental and institutional language policies, including official status and use (F7): The Constitution of India makes provision for '... free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.' The **National Policy on Education of 1968** spoke about the regional languages and the three Language Formula. The 1986 Policy reiterated the earlier stand. The **States Reorganization Commission** had asked the Union Government to elucidate a policy outline for education in mother tongue at the secondary stage. The **All India Council for Education** recommended the adoption of the Three Language Formula (TLF) in September 1956. The endorsement for this formula came from various directions. It was adopted later at the Chief Ministers' conference. According to this proposal, three languages would be taught at the secondary-school level: English, the local language, and Hindi; in Hindi speaking areas, another Indian or European language would be taught.

The UNESCO'S three basic policies are :

1. The UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality.

2. The UNESCO encourages bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality, and as a prerequisite for linguistically diverse societies.

3. The UNESCO supports language as an essential component of intercultural education as it wishes to contribute to understanding between different population groups and to ensure respect for fundamental rights.

In 2004, The government of Assam approved the teaching of the Tiwa Language as subject up to class IV. Significantly Don Bosco School of Karbi Anglong District also teaches the Tiwa language up to Class IV.

2.7 Amount and quality of documentation (F8) and Materials for language education and literacy (F5). The Tiwa language has no script to write. Assamese and Roman scripts are used in the writing of the language. Nothing has yet to come out in printed letters in the Tiwa Language. All the writings about the language and culture and other materials are published in both English and *Asamiya*.

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